



Medicine Buddha

On the Origin of Auspiciousness In the Substances and Symbols

Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on the Medicine Buddha.

I would like to begin by wishing all of you a good morning. As you have no doubt noticed, I usually begin teaching sessions with the short lineage supplication that begins with the words “Great Vajradhara.”* We use this supplication because it is the one most often practiced at the seats of the Kagyu tradition and by Kagyu practitioners elsewhere. It was composed by Pengar Jampal Zangpo, the foremost disciple of the Sixth Gyalwang Karmapa, Thongwa Dönden, and the root guru of the Seventh Gyalwang Karmapa, Chödrak Gyamtso. After receiving instructions from the Sixth Gyalwang Karmapa, Pengar Jampal Zangpo went to Sky Lake in the north of Tibet to practice. In the middle of this lake, there was an island called Semodo and on that island there was a mountain with a cave in it. In this cave in utter isolation he practiced for eighteen years. The isolation there is complete, because it is very difficult to get to that island except in the middle of winter. He practiced, therefore, in total isolation for eighteen years and developed extraordinary realization of mahamudra. This lineage supplication, which he composed after that period of retreat, is regarded as containing the essence and blessing of his realization,

***Editor's note:** See Shenpen Ösel, Vol. 3, No. 3, page 11, for an English translation.

which is therefore why we use it. So when you chant it, please do so with faith and devotion.

[Rinpoche and students recite supplication prayer.]

Before we discuss the recitation of the mantra, I would like to expand upon what I said yesterday about the offerings. During our discussion of the eight auspicious substances, we mentioned the conch shell and the durva grass, but I would like to discuss the origin of the auspiciousness of each of them in greater detail. The first of these is the conch shell. Immediately after the Buddha's awakening he realized that, although he himself had seen perfectly and completely the nature of all things, the dharmata—which is profound and tranquil and beyond all elaboration—he felt that were he to try to explain this to anyone else, they would be unable to understand it. So he resolved to remain in samadhi, alone in the forest. After he had remained in samadhi for forty-nine days, the god Indra, who was an emanation of a bodhisattva, appeared in front of the Buddha and offered him a white conch shell with its spiral going clockwise as an offering to encourage the Buddha to teach. It was in response to that first offering that the Buddha decided to turn the dharmachakra, or to teach the dharma.

The second auspicious substance is yogurt. This is connected with the Buddha's teaching that in order to practice dharma properly we need to abandon or transcend two extremes in lifestyle or conduct. One of these extremes is hedonism, in which your goal and your endeavor is to seek as much pleasure as possible—including the acquisition of fine clothes, fine food, and so on. The problem with this extreme is that, if it becomes your goal or obsession, it leaves no time or energy for the

practice of dharma. But we also need to abandon the other extreme, which is mortification of the body,* because the attempt to attain something through tormenting or depriving your physical body of what it needs does not lead to awakening, and in fact can slow down your progress towards the development of profound wisdom. In order to show by example that it is necessary to abandon the extreme of hedonism, the Buddha left the palace of his father, who was a king, and lived for six years on the banks of the Naranjana River in conditions of utmost austerity. But in order to show that one must also abandon the extreme of mortification, he accepted immediately before his awakening an offering of a mixture of yogurt and extremely condensed milk, which was given to him by a

Brahmin woman named Lekshe. Immediately upon his consuming this offering of yogurt, all of the marks and signs of physical perfection which adorn the body of a buddha, which had become somewhat indistinct during his years of austerity, immediately became distinct and resplendent.

The third auspicious substance is durva grass, which was offered to the Buddha by the grass-cutter and seller Tashi—meaning auspicious—shortly before his awakening, from which he made the mat-like seat on which he sat at the time of his awakening.

The fourth auspicious substance is vermilion. The origin of the auspiciousness of vermilion is this: When the Buddha

was in the process of attaining awakening or just about to attain it, Mara appeared and, exhibiting various sorts of unpleasant magical displays in order to obstruct the Buddha, finally challenged him, saying, “You cannot attain awakening; you

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*Editor's note: i.e. extreme asceticism

cannot do this.” In response to which the Buddha said, “Yes, I can, because I have completed the two accumulations over three periods of innumerable eons.” In response, Mara said, “Well, who is your witness? Who can you bring to prove this?”—in response to which the Buddha extended his right hand down past his right knee and touched the earth. The goddess of the earth then appeared out of the earth and, offering the Buddha vermilion, said, “I serve as witness that he has completed the two accumulations throughout these three periods of innumerable eons.”

The fifth auspicious substance is bilva fruit. The origin of the auspiciousness of this fruit is that when the Buddha, while living in the palace compound of his father, the king of the Shakyas, first observed the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death and resolved to attain freedom from them, he initially went to the root of a tree and practiced meditation there. During that time he developed a perfect state of shamatha, in acknowledgment of which the goddess or spirit of the tree offered him a bilva fruit.

The sixth auspicious substance is a mirror. The origin of the auspiciousness of the mirror is that when the Buddha had received and consumed the yogurt which he was offered by the Brahmin woman Lekshe, his physical form, which had become emaciated from his six years of austerity, was restored to its full vigor and majesty, causing the thirty-two marks and eighty signs of physical perfection to be vivid and apparent, in response to which the goddess of form—which in this instance appears to be a

goddess of the desire realm gods—appeared in front of the Buddha and offered him a mirror so that he could witness his own physical majesty and splendor.



The Buddha, practicing austerities

The seventh auspicious substance is called *givam*, a medicinal substance that is derived from some part of the body of the elephant—possibly from the elephant’s gall bladder. It is auspicious because it commemorates an occasion long after the Buddha’s awakening when the Buddha’s cousin, Devadata—who was always attempting to kill or otherwise harm the Buddha and had been doing so for many lives because he was afflicted with great jealousy of the Buddha—finally attempted to assassinate the Buddha by sending a mad elephant running out into the path where the

Buddha was walking. The Buddha emanated ten lions from his ten fingers, which slowed the elephant down. The elephant then bowed to the Buddha and offered himself, including his body, to the Buddha. Since *givam*, which is an effective medicine, comes from the body of an elephant, it commemorates that occasion in which the Buddha conquered the aggression of the mad elephant.

The eighth auspicious substance is white mustard seed, which was offered to the Buddha by Vajrapani on one of the fifteen days during the Buddha’s period of exhibition of miracles. At one time during the Buddha’s lifetime there were six prominent non-Buddhist religious teachers in India. At one point they gathered together and, in order to attempt to discredit the Buddha, they challenged him to a competition of

miracles. The Buddha accepted,* and the competition occurred at the beginning of what is now the first month of the Tibetan and Asian calendars. The Buddha's exhibition of miracles occurred from the first to the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. For the first eight days, the six other religious teachers competing were still present, but on the eighth day the Buddha scared them off in the following way: From the Buddha's throne the bodhisattva Vajrapani, accompanied by five fearsome *rakshasas*, emerged. Seeing that, the six *tirtika* teachers ran off as fast as they could and did not come back.

For the remaining week the Buddha exhibited miracles alone without any competition. When Vajrapani emerged from the Buddha's throne, he offered the Buddha white mustard seed, which therefore commemorates this occasion.

These eight auspicious substances are seemingly common things, but they have great auspicious significance because each of them commemorates a specific occasion connected with the arising of dharma in this world, its teaching, its increase, and the demonstration of its power and benefit.

The second set of offerings are the eight auspicious signs or marks.** The marks or shapes of these items resemble the shapes of particular parts of the Buddha's body, and have therefore come to serve as emblems of the buddhadharma. The first of these, which I mentioned yesterday, is the parasol. The round shape of the parasol is like the beautifully round shape

***Editor's note:** This is very interesting story, for the Buddha actually accepted and then postponed this event many times, before finally accepting the challenge. For a further description of this event, see Thich Nhat Hanh's *Old Path White Clouds*.

****Editor's note:** Generally referred to as the eight auspicious symbols.

*****Editor's note:** sometimes called the endless knot or the knot of eternity.

of the Buddha's head.

The second sign or symbol is the auspicious fish; the shape of the fish represents the shape of the Buddha's eyes when his eyes were half-closed in the posture of meditation. The third is the auspicious vase, which represents the Buddha's throat, in part because of the shape of his neck, but also because out of the throat of the Buddha emerges the sacred dharma which, like the ambrosia from a precious vase, satisfies all the needs of beings, assuages the thirst of samsara, removes suffering, brings happiness, and is inexhaustible.

The fourth is the auspicious conch, which in this case represents the speech of the Buddha. The conch is used as a musical instrument and as a horn to call people from a great distance. It is famous as having a resounding and clear sound. In the same way, the Buddha's speech is always of an appropriate volume and melody. If you are sitting close to the Buddha, his voice does not sound too loud, but if you are sitting very far away

from him you can still hear it.

The fifth is the precious victory banner. The precious victory banner represents the fitting and beautiful quality of the Buddha's form in general, which is perfectly proportioned. All of his body parts are the right size for the rest of his body; it is not as though he has a huge head and his arms are too short or his legs are too short or anything like that. His body is perfectly proportioned.

The sixth one is the glorious knot,*** which represents the Buddha's heart or mind. This doesn't mean that he literally has the design of the glorious knot on his chest. It means that his mind or his heart knows everything completely and clearly, without limitation.

The seventh is the lotus, which represents the tongue of the Buddha, which is supple, fine, and slender. With it he can speak clearly. In whatever he wants to say his enunciation is

The fish represents the shape of the Buddha's eyes when his eyes were half-closed in the posture of meditation

perfect; also his tongue and saliva improve the taste of all food.

The eighth is the auspicious wheel, which is actually found as a design on the soles of the Buddha's feet—the image of a golden wheel. This represents his turning of the wheel of the dharma, by means of which beings are liberated.*

Because these eight marks or signs are images that naturally occur on a buddha's body or resemble certain qualities of the Buddha, then they have become embodiments in and of themselves of auspiciousness and goodness. Therefore, it is believed that to keep them in your home, or to wear them on your body, brings auspiciousness. In this sadhana, we offer them and by offering them we accumulate great merit, through which inauspicious circumstances that inhibit the dharma practice of the practitioner, and of beings in general, are averted.

The third set of offerings in this section of the practice are the seven articles of royalty, which are, literally speaking, things [and types of animals and people] that are always found in the entourage of a chakravartin, a monarch who rules over an entire world or universe. As I mentioned yesterday, they correspond internally to the seven limbs of the path of awakening, which are seven qualities that all buddhas and bodhisattvas possess as factors of their attaining awakening. The first of the seven articles of royalty is the precious jewel, which corresponds to the virtue of faith. A bodhisattva must possess abundant and excellent faith to serve as ground for the development of all good qualities. The meaning of this is that if one has faith, then all other qualities, such as meditative

***Editor's note:** The takeoff point for this description is the Buddha Shakyamuni, but it should be understood that these attributes are present in male and female buddhas alike.

stability, diligence, insight into the meaning of dharma and so on, will definitely arise, and on the basis of their arising, one will be able to eradicate all that is to be transcended or abandoned.

The second branch of awakening is knowledge or insight, *prajna*. Of the seven articles of royalty, this knowledge corresponds to the

precious wheel, which enables the chakravartin to be victorious against any kind of invasion or warfare. In the same way, it is knowledge, or *prajna*, that enables one to conquer the *kleshas* and ignorance.**

The third branch of awakening is *samadhi* or meditative absorption, which serves as the necessary ground for knowledge or *prajna*. If *prajna* is grounded in *samadhi*, then it will be stable, tranquil, effective, and appropriate or correct. If it is not grounded in *samadhi* then *prajna* goes off the track, becomes incorrect and runs wild, so that it actually is more of a problem

than a benefit. The third article of royalty is the consort of the monarch. The consort serves to keep the monarch on track, to pacify and tame the monarch. So therefore, the consort corresponds to *samadhi*.

The fourth branch of awakening is joy, which arises from the correct presence and application of both *samadhi* and *prajna*. Joy here refers, for

****Editor's note:** It is important to understand that the term *prajna* includes in one term the notions of knowledge, wisdom, and primordial awareness or transcendental awareness, which is the highest form of *prajna*. Worldly knowledge—medicine, literature, business management, economics or anthropology—is one form of *prajna*. Knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha and other enlightened beings is spiritual *prajna*. Both worldly and spiritual *prajna* are based on the acquisition of information, and though they may have a great deal of practical benefit, they will not by themselves liberate one from the root causes of suffering. Only the highest form of *prajna*, *jnana*—primordial awareness, which is liberated from the superimposition on experience of perceiver and perceived—will free one from the root causes of suffering.

example, to the joy of the attainment of the first bodhisattva level, which is called the Utterly Joyful. Of the seven articles of royalty, joy corresponds to the precious minister. In most enumerations this is a minister who gives wise council to the monarch and therefore promotes joy. Sometimes it is also called the precious householder, which is the subject of the monarch who also brings appropriate advice.

The fifth limb of awakening is diligence and this corresponds to the precious excellent horse. Just as an excellent horse enables the monarch to travel anywhere they wish to go with great speed, in the same way the possession of diligence enables the bodhisattva to cultivate the qualities of samadhi and prajna, and, through cultivating them, to eradicate the kleshas and to increase all positive qualities.

The sixth article of royalty is the precious elephant. The significance of this elephant is that it is extremely peaceful and tame, so it represents, from among the seven limbs of awakening, the faculty of mindfulness, which is a mind kept tranquil and always consciously aware of what is going on in the mind and what one's actions are.

The seventh and last limb of awakening is equanimity, a state of mind in which the bodhisattva is free from the afflictions of attachment to some things and aversion to other things. Through the faculty of equanimity, the bodhisattva overcomes the warfare of the kleshas. Of the seven articles of royalty, it is represented by the precious general, because the precious general overcomes all warfare and aggression. So these are the seven articles of royalty, which are offered as symbols of the seven limbs or factors of awakening.

Externally one is symbolically offering the seven articles of royalty, but internally one is offering the seven limbs of awakening. Offering

the seven limbs of awakening means cultivating these virtues within oneself. By cultivating them within oneself, one enters the true and genuine path leading to awakening, which is the most pleasing of all things to all buddhas and

bodhisattvas. The cultivation of these and other virtues is the ultimate or true offering to buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is why they are offered at this point.

Next we come to the visualization that accompanies the repetition of the mantra. In the text it says to visualize in the center of the heart of oneself as the Medicine Buddha, and in the heart of the front visualization of the Medicine Buddha, the seed syllable HUM surrounded by the garland of the mantra. In detail, one visualizes a moon disc—a

disc of white light that represents the moon—lying flat in the very center of one's body at the level of the heart. Standing upright upon this disk is visualized the seed syllable of the deity, a blue HUM, which represents the deity's mind or wisdom. Surrounding the HUM is visualized the garland of the mantra from which rays of light will emanate and so forth.*

The HUNG in the heart of the self and front visualizations is surrounded by the mantra garland.
TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE RADZA SAMUDGATE SO HA

Having visualized the moon disc, the HUM syllable, and the mantra garland in the heart of both the self and front visualizations, you then

***Editor's note:** The syllable HUM standing in the center of the deity's heart in both the self and front visualization faces forward, in the same direction as the deity. The mantra garland, visualized in Tibetan, faces outward—which means that one could read it standing outside the Medicine Buddha but not from the perspective of the HUM in the heart, beginning with TAYATA directly in front of the central seed syllable HUM and arranged in a circle surrounding the seed syllable.

think that from the syllable HUM and the mantra garland in the heart of the self-visualization rays of multicolored light shoot out towards the front visualization. These rays of light strike the heart of the front visualization, arousing its nonconceptual compassion and causing rays of multicolored light to emerge from the mantra garland and syllable HUM in its heart, which proceed to the eastern pure realm of the Medicine Buddha, called the Light of Vaidurya. On the tips of each of these multicolored rays of light are offering goddesses who make innumerable offerings to the Medicine Buddha, the seven other medicine buddhas, the sixteen bodhisattvas, and so on. These offerings serve to arouse their compassion; to remind them of their promises, vows, and aspirations to benefit beings; and to cause them to release their blessings.

The blessings of their body take the form of innumerable forms of the Medicine Buddha and his retinue—huge ones, tiny ones, and every size in between. These innumerable forms of the principal Medicine Buddha, the other medicine buddhas, and the bodhisattvas, rain down and dissolve into you as the self-visualization and into the front visualization, granting you the blessings of the body of the Medicine Buddha and his retinue.

At the same time, the blessing of their speech is emitted in the form of the mantra garlands, which in this case are multicolored. Mantra garlands of various colors rain down from the pure realms of the Medicine Buddha and dissolve into you as the Medicine Buddha and into the front visualization, granting you the blessings of their speech.

Finally, the blessing of their mind, which strictly speaking has no form, is for the purpose of this visualization embodied in the form of what is held in the Medicine Buddha's hands—the arura and the begging bowls filled with ambrosia. These are emitted and rain down and

dissolve into you as the Medicine Buddha and into the front visualization, granting you the blessing of their mind.

If you can visualize clearly, it is best to do all of this very slowly and gradually. While you continue to say the mantra, you think that rays of light emerge from the self-visualization, go to the front visualization, and then from the front visualization outwards to the pure realms, proceeding gradually and slowly. Especially when the blessings of body, speech, and mind rain down upon and dissolve into you, you can do the visualizations in sequence: first, visualizing the blessings of body raining down, without being in any kind of a hurry and so quite distinctly; and then visualizing the blessings of speech and then the blessings of mind. If you

find that the visualization is extremely unclear, if you wish, you can do it all at once. But if you do it gradually and slowly, you will find that you will get a much stronger sense of the blessings actually entering into you. By taking your time with the visualization, you will develop real confidence, a real feeling of the blessings entering into you.

When you receive the blessing of the Medicine Buddha, and of buddhas and bodhisattvas in general, various unpleasant things—obstacles, sickness, demonic disturbances—will be pacified, and compassion, faith, devotion, insight, and so on will flourish and increase. In order to practice the descent of blessing most effectively, it is a good idea to focus the blessings on whatever is afflicting you most at that time. For example, if you are having a particular physical problem—an illness or some other physical problem—or a particular mental problem—a particular klesha, a particular type of stress, or particular worries—you can focus the absorption of the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas on that. You can focus it on the removal of wrongdoing and obscurations in general, but focus it especially on

By taking your time with the visualization, you will develop real confidence, a feeling of the blessings entering into you

what you regard as your greatest concern at the moment. For example, you may feel that you lack a specific quality: If you feel that you lack insight or you lack compassion or you lack faith, then think that the blessing serves to promote that quality that you feel you are most lacking. And feel that through the absorption of these blessings you actually become filled with that quality as though it were a substance that were actually filling your whole body.

Those visualizations are for the usual, formal practice of the Medicine Buddha. In his book *Mountain Dharma: Instructions for Retreat*, Karma Chakme Rinpoche recommends the following visualization for the actual alleviation of sickness. You can visualize yourself as the Medicine Buddha, if you wish, but the main focus is to actually visualize a small form of the Medicine Buddha, no larger than four finger-widths in height, in the actual part of your body that is afflicted. So if it is an illness or pain in the head, visualize a small Medicine Buddha in the head; if it is in the hand, visualize a small Medicine Buddha in the hand; if it is in the foot, then visualize a small Medicine Buddha in the foot. Visualize the Medicine Buddha in that place, and think that from this small but vivid form of the Medicine Buddha rays of light are emitted. These rays of light are not simply light, which is dry, but liquid light having a quality of ambrosia. This luminous ambrosia or liquid light actually cleanses and removes the sickness and pain—whatever it is. You can do this not only for yourself, by visualizing the Medicine Buddha in the appropriate part of your own body, but you can do it for others as well by visualizing the Medicine Buddha in the appropriate part of their body or bodies. The radiation of rays of light of ambrosia and so on is the same.

This can be applied not only

to physical sickness but to mental problems as well. If you want to get rid of a particular type of anxiety or stress or depression or fear or any other kind of unpleasant mental experience, you can visualize the Medicine Buddha seated above the top of your head and think in the same way as before that luminous ambrosia or liquid light emerges from his body, filling your body and cleansing you of any problem, whatever it is.

You might think that all of this sounds a bit childish, but in fact it actually works, and you will find that out if you try it.

Following the repetition of the mantra comes the conclusion of the practice.

**I confess all wrongs and downfalls and dedicate all virtue to awakening.
May there be the auspiciousness of freedom from sickness, harmful spirits, and suffering.**

First is the admission of defects. With an attitude of regret for anything that you have done that is wrong or inappropriate, you simply say, “I confess all wrongs and downfalls.” Immediately after that you dedicate the merit or virtue of the practice to the awakening of all beings saying, “And dedicate all virtue to awakening.” Then you make an auspicious aspiration which focuses your dedication, saying, “Through this dedication of merit, may there be freedom from sickness, harmful spirits, and suffering for all beings.”

Next comes the dissolution of the mandala:

**The wordly ones return to their own places. BENZA MU.
The jnana and samaya sattvas dissolve into me,
And I dissolve into the expanse of all goodness, primordial purity. E MA HO.**

First a request to depart is addressed to the mundane deities, which is followed by the dissolution of the front and self-

If you feel that you lack insight or you lack compassion or you lack faith, then think that the blessing serves to promote that quality that you feel you are most lacking

visualizations of the wisdom deities. When you say, “Worldly ones return to your own places, *vajramu*,” you think that the ten protectors of the ten directions, the twelve yaksha chieftains, and the four great kings—all mundane deities visualized in the entourage of the front visualization—return to where they would normally reside.* That leaves the eight Medicine Buddhas and the sixteen bodhisattvas in the front visualization. These deities, who are the wisdom deities embodying the visualized images of them,** dissolve into your heart as the self visualization. Then the self-visualization gradually dissolves into light and then into the expanse of emptiness, at which point you say, “And I dissolve into the expanse of the all-good primordial purity.” At that point you rest your mind in the experience of emptiness.

All yidam practices include two stages: the generation stage and the completion stage. Everything up to this point—the visualization of the forms of the deities, the presentation of offerings and so on, the repetition of the mantra with the accompanying visualizations—are all aspects of the practice of the generation stage. When, subsequent to the dissolution of the visualization, you rest your mind in emptiness,

***Editor’s note:** What the translator is here calling mundane deities—in fact, if we met one of them, one suspects that one would think of them as anything but mundane, just as if we met Flash Gordon or Darth Vader we would hardly regard either of them as mundane—are what are oftentimes referred to as worldly deities, which means that, although they are said to reside somewhere in the gods’ realms and are said to be very powerful, they are not said to be enlightened. Buddhists recognize the relative reality of such deities, make offerings to them in order to please them, ask them politely not to bother dharma practitioners, ask for their protection, even ask them sometimes to help out with the weather, but never take refuge in them, for they themselves are not thought to be liberated from samsara.

****Editor’s note:** i.e. the jnanasattvas and the samayasattvas.

Visualization and other generation stage practices function to weaken the kleshas, while completion stage practices, which include . . . shamata and vipashyana, serve to eradicate them

this is the practice of the completion stage. It is through the practice of these two stages that you actually come to realize dharmata, the nature of things. Visualization and other generation stage practices function to weaken the kleshas, while completion stage practices, which include the practices of shamata and vipashyana, serve to eradicate them.

I mentioned yesterday that there are three Medicine Buddha practices that are used in our tradition—a long one, a medium one, and a short one—and that this is the short one. While this is the shortest, it is nevertheless considered the most effective. The long and medium forms of the Medicine Buddha are entirely sutra-oriented in style and content. This practice is a blend of the sutra tradition and the tantric or vajrayana tradition. So while it is the shortest liturgically, it is the most complete because it has the most elaborate visualizations.

In the long and intermediate forms of the Medicine Buddha practice, because they are entirely sutric in approach, there is a preliminary meditation on emptiness, after which you imagine a palace as a residence for the front visualization and then you invite the deities to abide within that. There is not the precise development of the form of the deities, as in this case, nor is there any self-visualization, because it is entirely sutric. This practice which we are using includes the vajrayana practice of self-visualization and the precise details of the visualization. Therefore, it is considered to be more effective, to have more power.

Question: Rinpoche, I was interested in hearing your different elaborations on the “seven articles” of the mandala offering. I have done the mandala offering in my ngöndro practice and

there the offerings seem so much more concrete than the descriptions of the same articles we heard from you earlier today. Your descriptions of the “seven articles” of the chakravartin presented them much more as symbolic representations. Are they more concrete in some practices? Are there different practices? Are these different views? Do they come from the sutras, from the commentaries, from the vajrayana? Or do they vary for certain people?

And then I have a particular question about the person of the chakravartin, the universal monarch. We in the West, wrongly or rightly, have the notion that democracy is the best way. I’m just wondering—this chakravartin seems like a wonderful being, yet he or she—you didn’t mention any gender—this person seems to need help with faith, stability, exertion, with many different qualities. We in the West have found that a universal sort of monarch or ruler usually eventually goes wrong. Could you tell me what is different about this chakravartin that is going to make their rule so very successful, because we haven’t had that experience?

Rinpoche: With regard to your first question, the correspondence between the “seven articles” of royalty, which are the characteristic possessions of a chakravartin, and the “seven limbs of awakening”—which are necessary resources on the path for bodhisattvas—is a standard one. In cases where the symbolic meaning of offering the “seven articles” of royalty is not explained, it simply means that it is a briefer explanation of the significance of that offering. This correspondence definitely does function in all uses of those things as offering substances or items.

With regard to your second question, the chakravartin only arises in certain periods of history, which are called the best times or the best ages. What distinguishes a chakravartin from some kind of cosmic dictator is the arising of the chakravartin in human society at that point as a solution to problems rather than the beginning of them. A chakravartin arises at a time when there is disputation as to who should lead the society. The chakravartin him or her-

self, is not particularly [eager or] anxious to do so, but is altruistic, capable, and acclaimed by the society at large, which places them in their position of authority. Now, it is entirely possible that after the reign of a chakravartin, if a dynasty is established, things could degenerate, as your question indicates. But then they would no longer be chakravartins.

Question: So, are you saying there could be a female universal monarch, a chakravartini?

Rinpoche: Of course.

Question: What is the Sanskrit name of Sangye Menla?

Translator: The most common name found in the sutras is *Bhaishajyai Guru*, which means the teacher of medicine. That is translated into Tibetan as *Mengyi Lama*, or *Menla* for short. That’s why we call it Sangye Menla or the Medicine Buddha. Menla literally means Medicine Guru.

Question: Rinpoche, over and over again you talk about how in a way almost all of these practices are a backdrop for what the real practice is, which is faith and devotion that the practice will actually work. It seems that all practices in a way should be aimed at intensifying that. You say, “intense supplication,” and there have been times in my practice when that just came, and I felt a fervor of faith. Then other times I really wished I had it, because I really felt like I needed it. You talk about generating bodhicitta or generating faith. What is the process of generating? I can put the thought in my mind, but if there is also pervasive doubt and pervasive cynicism . . . I come from a kind of culture of doubt and of questioning and of philosophical b.s., so it’s very difficult to talk about these concepts with absolute faith. What is the method of generating intense faith?

Rinpoche: The approach is to try to develop informed faith. Informed faith comes about through investigation. Through investigating the

meaning of dharma you discover valid reasons why it is appropriate to have faith in it. That will naturally make faith a matter of common sense.

Question: Rinpoche, what is the translation of the mantra? And when does the visualization of the blessings' coming down in the form of small Medicine Buddhas and the begging bowl and the fruit and the mantra stop? And when it stops, it's not yet the dissolution, is it? What are we resting in at that point?

Translator: You mean after the descent of blessings ends, and before you dissolve the visualization?

Question: Right.

Rinpoche: The mantra that you recite is basically an elaboration of the name of the Medicine Buddha. It is more or less reciting the name of the Medicine Buddha in Sanskrit. The point at which you stop visualizing the blessings of body, speech, and mind being absorbed into you again and again is up to you. You can continue that visualization for the entire duration of your recitation of the mantra, in which case there is not much in-between that and the dissolution of the mandala. Or from time to time, you can stop visualizing and just rest in devotion. It is not the case that you need to spend absolutely every instant of your mantra recitation dissolving these things into you. As long as there is faith and devotion, then it does not have to be constant.

Question: Is this mantra best used for animals that are dying, and what about animals that might have just recently died, perhaps quickly?

Rinpoche: It will also benefit an animal that has recently died; it is going to be most effective, of course, if it is used just before the animal dies.

But it will still benefit them afterwards.

Question: Rinpoche, thank you for the teaching. Given the aspirations of the Medicine Buddha, would it be appropriate to have a representation of the Medicine Buddha in the heart of the house, the family room, and particularly if the rest of one's family thinks the mother is completely strange. [laughter] And I've been told to recite *om mani peme hung* around dying and dead animals. Would it be more appropriate to recite the Medicine Buddha mantra?

Rinpoche: Reciting *om mani peme hung* or the Medicine Buddha's name or mantra to a dying animal will have pretty much equal benefit, so it is up to you. Both Avalokiteshvara and the

Medicine Buddha have made specific aspirations to be of benefit to beings in that way. It does not matter, either one. With regard to your first question: While placing a large and prominent image of the Medicine Buddha in the very center of your home would ultimately have long-term benefits for the members of your family, it might, as your question indicates, create more problems in the short-term. Specifically, it might create more resistance. It would probably be better to allow your family to

encounter the Medicine Buddha sort of incidentally, rather than having it thrust in their face.

Question: A small thangka on the wall, would that be better?

Rinpoche: If it does not cause disharmony within the home, then of course that would be fine. If it does, then it would be better that they encounter it somewhere outside the home.

We're going to stop here for this morning and conclude with the dedication of merit. 51